

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MARCH 5 EDITION

Trinity UMC's Stephen Ministry is a source of care and support

By Kelly Roberson

Part of our call to discipleship is to carry each other's burdens as we fulfill Christ's command to love God and love others. In times of overwhelming difficulty, having someone to walk alongside us in faith and prayer - to help carry our burdens - can make all the difference.

This is the core principle behind Stephen Ministry, a one-to-one lay caring ministry deeply rooted in a biblical understanding of Jesus, His church, and His ministry.

Stephen Ministry offers a proven and effective way to organize, equip, and supervise a team of congregation members—called Stephen Ministers—to provide high-quality, Christ-centered care to people in the congregation and the community experiencing life difficulties.

Trinity United Methodist Church, located in the heart of downtown Savannah, began its Stephen Ministry in the Fall of 2023 with the commissioning of six Stephen Ministers.

A Stephen Minister is someone who walks alongside a hurting person as a caring Christian friend. They are not a counselor or therapist, nor are they there to solve problems. Instead, they offer compassionate listening and support, providing a safe space for individuals to share their thoughts and feelings.

“The goal of this ministry is to assist our pastor in providing one to one care for those going through a difficult time, those who are grieving, those who have received a diagnosis of illness, or those just needing someone to listen,” said Dr. Kelly Styles, chair of the Stephen Ministry team at Trinity UMC.

At its heart, Trinity's Stephen Ministry aims to support individuals who possess normal coping skills but find themselves struggling during life's most challenging moments. This can include situations such as hospitalization, family crises, separation or divorce, terminal illness, bereavement or loss, job crises, relationship issues, life transitions such as becoming an “empty nester,” or relocating to a new area. Additionally, Stephen Ministers provide support to new members of the church or community, the homebound, those experiencing loneliness, and individuals going through a spiritual crisis.

Dr. Styles has witnessed the profound impact of Stephen Ministry at Trinity firsthand. Following a significant tragedy experienced by a family within the church, Stephen Ministers devoted considerable time to engage with them through conversations, texts, and ensuring they felt God's presence and the support of the congregation. This level of support necessitated a deep understanding of the family's situation and the development of specific active listening skills to effectively minister to their needs.

The Rev. Dr. Ben Gosden, senior pastor of Trinity UMC, has also seen the significant impact the ministry is making in the life of the congregation.

“Stephen Ministry leans into what the Church does best — loving others in life-giving ways,” said Dr. Gosden. “It's so moving how this ministry is not only thriving in its own self, but it's impacting the ways we bring care into all of our other ministries. It's a very profound gift that continues to pay dividends in our congregational life.”

Both Dr. Gosden and Dr. Styles see the Stephen Ministry as a catalyst for expanding Trinity's reach into the community.

“We have merged all our care ministries - Stephen Ministry, prayer group, card writing, faith-partners, home communion - in order to ensure that those in need are identified and cared for. Our Care Ministry Team now serves as ‘lookouts’ as too many folks just will not contact us themselves (when in need),” said Dr. Styles.

Hoping to continue to grow this ministry, Dr. Styles has plans to offer another Stephen Minister training later this Spring. Stephen Ministers undergo extensive training, receiving 50 hours of instruction on how to provide distinctively Christian care. They are committed to their own spiritual growth and participate in regular supervision meetings to enhance their skills and effectiveness in providing care.

Dr. Styles has found that individuals who are hurting truly appreciate an empathetic ear that is not a family member, pastor, or known friend. Additionally, he would encourage any church to consider this ministry both to assist an already busy pastor but also to build camaraderie among those who are serving as Stephen Ministers.

“I knew no one in our class at the beginning and now we have become anchors for each other and key drivers to build all our ministries,” said Dr. Styles. “I’m looking forward to expanding this affinity of discipleship to our entire Care Ministry team and the next Stephens’ class.”

Kelly Roberson is the Director of Communications/Conference Ministries for the South Georgia Conference.



Wesley UMC receives Renfro Trust Grant

By Kelly Roberson

Wesley United Methodist Church in Taylor County is the 2023 South Georgia recipient of the Renfro Trust Grant.

The Renfro Trust awards grants for the purpose of establishing and supporting United Methodist churches in rural areas of the United States within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. These “brick and mortar” grant applications are considered for projects involving new or existing church buildings.

“Wesley UMC is honored to receive the Renfro Trust Grant,” said Eloise Doty, a member of the congregation. “Our church is small in membership but large in spirit!”

Located in Butler, Ga., Wesley UMC was established in 1900. Taylor County, though large in land mass, only has 8,000 people. Wesley UMC is an important part of this small, rural community.

Their sanctuary was built in 1904 at a time when few places had indoor plumbing and when most people could easily climb the steps into the building. In order to make the sanctuary more accessible and welcoming for the people of their community, members of the church realize updates need to be made. They have already built a ramp to enter the sanctuary and now want to add a restroom. Their challenge, however, is the cost associated with these updates.

“In recent years we have invested in making this church handicap accessible by adding a beautiful handicap ramp to the church’s front entrance. In addition, we have moved from one service per month to two services per month and have plans to add a mid-week Bible study. Most importantly, we have recently welcomed new

members. We can see how the addition of a restroom will be an important next step to future growth,” read the church’s grant application.

This grant will not only help them build this restroom, it will help make Wesley UMC a more desirable place to worship for the people of Taylor County.

"We are grateful to be named as recipients of this important grant," said Rev. Howard White, pastor of Wesley UMC. "Updating our facilities is one significant step in becoming a more welcoming and accommodating place of worship for our community."

Last year, Wesley UMC was recognized by the South Georgia Conference as a fruitful church and a three-star church. They also received the Carruth Mission Award for mission giving.

"We celebrate what God is doing to bring new life in churches like Wesley UMC," said Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, Conference Secretary for Global Ministries.

As part of his role as the Conference Secretary for Global Ministries, Rev. Garth Duke-Barton is part of the group that helps make determinations about who receives grant money. For more information on Renfro Trust Grant, email him at revgarth0810@gmail.com.

Kelly Roberson is the Director of Communications/Conference Ministries for the South Georgia Conference.



Clergy gather as part of the self-care and wellness initiative

By Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed

The beautiful campus of The Methodist Children’s Home was the site of the third of four self-care, wellness initiatives. The self-care and wellness initiative is a collaboration with the Conference Task Force on Mental Health and the Diversity and Justice Ministries Office for the South Georgia Conference.

South Georgia was awarded a grant from the General Commission on Religion and Race to focused on mental health for its minority clergy. The first gathering was The Bishop’s Day Apart, held in November 2023. The second was held on January 16 in Macon designed for our Spanish speaking clergy. The most recent gathering on Friday, February 16, was specifically designed for all African American pastors.

This self-care intensive focused on the “racialized trauma” and its impact upon African American pastors.

Mental health is important for all members of our conference, but it is especially important to acknowledge and address those challenges faced by minority clergy due to past and or present realities.

Each day long session has been specifically designed to allow ‘those called, anointed, appointed and set apart’ who provide leadership and guidance to others in their spiritual journey a unique opportunity to reflect, discuss, and retool their own mental health outlook.

Gallop polls have consistently over the years ([Mind the Workplace 2023 Report](#)) reported that job burnout is real and contributes to mental health struggles and psychological distress of those in stressful occupations.

While leading a church is a privilege and an honor, it can also be super stressful. Becoming aware of pastoral

stress is key to long-term health as a leader. A recent Lifeway study reported that [63% of all pastors' report stress](#) as one of their greatest mental challenges.

As with the first gathering, the February gathering was led by Dr. Ronald Bell of the Board of Global Ministries Upper Room Ministries. In each session he has used his unique gift and abilities to lead participants to self-assess how one of the most dangerous parts of stress is that it can be difficult to recognize. Self-care is paramount. We live in a time where none of us are exempt from demanding schedules, long hours, high stress, and emotionally taxing situations on regular basis. We are reminded to follow the example set by Jesus throughout the Gospels which is to assess and care for our well-being and emotional health. Be intentional about your self-care.

As mentioned by one of the participants: "This session was well worth the drive to Macon, and the hospitality at the Methodist Home is always outstanding."

Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed is the Director for Diversity and Justice Ministries for the South Georgia Conference. She can be reached at abra@sgaumc.com.



Happy 90th Birthday, Bishop Looney!

On February 14, Bishop Richard Looney – who was the first bishop of the South Georgia Annual Conference - celebrated a remarkable milestone: his 90th birthday.

Bishop Looney's life and ministry have been a testament to his faith, compassion, and extraordinary storytelling ability. As a cherished leader in The United Methodist Church, he has touched countless lives with his wisdom and grace.

In honor of Bishop Looney's 90th birthday, you are invited to enjoy a collection of some of his most memorable stories [in this video](#) - put together by the Holston Annual Conference. His captivating tales not only reflect his deep spiritual insight but also his wonderful sense of humor and love for life.

Bishop Looney, we add our birthday wishes from the South Georgia Conference! May your year be filled with love, laughter, and the warmth of cherished memories.



UMCOR Sunday is March 10

We are celebrating the ministry of UMCOR this Sunday, March 10. Gifts to the [UMCOR Sunday](#) offering call United Methodists to share the goodness of life with those who are hurting. Your gifts to the UMCOR Sunday offering lay the foundation for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to share God's love with communities everywhere. The special offering underwrites UMCOR's "costs of doing business." This helps UMCOR keep the promise that 100 percent of any gift to a specific UMCOR project will go toward that project and not administrative costs. [Learn more about UMCOR here.](#)

WHAT IS UMCOR SUNDAY?

This Special Sunday is a denomination wide celebration designed to raise awareness and support for the ministry of The United Methodist Committee on Relief – otherwise known as UMCOR. The UMCOR Sunday offering underwrites UMCOR’s administrative costs to ensure 100% of gifts given for humanitarian response and recovery go directly to communities in need. These gifts ensure UMCOR can respond swiftly to disasters around the world and represent hope and healing to those most vulnerable. Gifts can be made [online](#), or by check to local churches.

UMCOR, provides hope for communities and individuals whose lives have been upset by war, storms or other crises. This ministry is achieved exclusively through your generosity. Last year, your generosity delivered **\$1.7 million** towards these ministries:

- **International Disaster Response** efforts provide assistance following natural or human-caused disasters outside of the United States. Typical emergency response efforts include the distribution of food, hygiene supplies and facilities, nonfood items, psychosocial support and shelter. Learn more [here](#).
- **U.S. Disaster Response** works with annual conferences in the United States to alleviate suffering caused by disasters that strike within the United States and its territories. In partnership with conference level disaster response coordinators, UMCOR journeys with affected communities throughout a disaster’s cycle. Learn more [here](#).
- **Global Migration** provides relief and recovery in the form of food aid, basic necessities, and legal and transportation services for vulnerable migrants and refugees. Learn more [here](#).
- **Relief Supplies** UMCOR Sager Brown Depot and affiliate warehouses within the UM Relief Supply Network collect relief supplies that are assembled by United Methodist volunteers for distribution in the United States and its territories in response to disasters. Learn more [here](#).

UMCOR’s goal is to assist vulnerable people affected by crisis or chronic need without regard to their nationality, race, religion or status. We believe all people have God-given worth and dignity.

One of the wonderful aspects of the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church is that we can do so much more together than we ever could do on our own. Because of you – UMCOR and its partners serve as witnesses to God’s love for all.

You can support this Special Sunday by giving online at UMC.org/SSGive, through your local United Methodist Church or mail a check to: GCFA. P.O. Box 340029, Nashville, TN 37203. For mailed checks, please include “UMCOR Sunday” in the note section.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

- [Read stories](#) about the impact you are making with your gifts
- [Use the resources](#) designed specifically to celebrate UMCOR Sunday
- [Explore and share the Did You Know resources](#) to learn more about this Special Sunday



March ‘One Matters’ Resource Toolkit: Whose burdens are you carrying?

Connectional Ministries understand the importance of making disciples and nurturing spiritual growth within local congregations. Transformation is happening every single day across the South Georgia Conference.

We loved hearing the feedback from our [first resource toolkit in February](#) and are excited to roll out a new toolkit for March as we continue to put focus on our theme of "One Matters." [This toolkit](#) is designed to empower clergy and laity in their sacred mission of cultivating meaningful connections and fostering transformative discipleship. A single challenge question will be presented, followed by accompanying resources tailored to address that specific challenge.

[March's toolkit hit inboxes of clergy and lay leaders on](#) Monday, March 4. March's challenge question is: **Whose burdens are you carrying?** Christian community is more than gatherings, celebrations, and potlucks. Authentic Christian community walks together during good times and hard times, providing an opportunity to be cared for in loving relationships. What does that look like and how do we do that in our discipleship groups? Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." This month let's focus on caring for each other and sharing our burdens as we seek to love God and love others.

To go along with the challenge question, a step-by-step resource – [6:2 Questions](#) – is available that offers 6 questions for two people to talk through each week. For a season, set a weekly meeting with a mentor or trusted friend. Use the questions in this resource as you share, care, and carry each other's burdens.

In addition, a [17-minute training video led by Anne Bosarge](#) challenges us to look at why it's important (and Biblical!) to carry each other's burdens, including practical steps we can take to "share, care, and carry." You are also encouraged to check out this month's book recommendation: ["Changes that Heal"](#) by Dr. Henry Cloud.

Using the 3Practice Circle model to explore our question of the month: "Whose burdens are you carrying?", Revs. Teresa Edwards, Meg Procopio, and Jared Wilson will facilitate this tool for open, honest dialogue that offers space to learn from each other's lived experiences. [More details on the 3Practice Circle model can be found here.](#) Set for Thursday, March 21 @ noon via Zoom, the framing statement will be: 'Jesus says to bear one another's burdens. Here's what that looks like in my world...' [Register now.](#)

[View March's Toolkit here](#) | [Sign up to receive the monthly toolkit](#)

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We're having dinner near you in April! Come join us!

Do you love a good potluck? Have you seen the amazing power of a meal to bring people together at the table? Are you interested in doing church and community in a new way? Dinner Church is a way to provide a spiritual environment for people who might never step foot into a traditional church model. Over a meal and a casual conversation, Dinner Church allows people from all walks of life to discover Jesus in community. We hope you will join us this April at a location near you. Click the link below to register. Questions? Contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

- [April 4 - Pittman Park, Statesboro](#)
 - [April 5 - ConneXion Church, Savannah](#)
 - [April 6 - Waycross FUMC, Waycross](#)
 - [April 18 - Trinity UMC, Warner Robins](#)
 - [April 19 - New Vision, Thomasville](#)
 - [April 20 - Mosaic Church, Valdosta](#)
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Setting the stage for digital ministry this March and April

Does your church have a digital presence or are you actually doing digital ministry? If you're ready to move from using social media channels to communicate information to creating online relationships that facilitate transformation, then join us for an introductory zoom that will give you practical ideas for taking your digital presence to the next step. Choose the time that works best for you: [March 7 at 6pm or March 8 at 12 noon](#)

After this introductory zoom, you will have the option to sign up for a five-month cohort. Join us as we explore how in-person and digital opportunities can work together to create a holistic discipleship experience for the people you are currently reaching and beyond. This is for clergy and key volunteers or staff who help facilitate discipleship within the church. The cohort will meet twice monthly on Thursday nights from 6-7:30pm via Zoom ([April 11, April 25, May 9, May 23, June 6, June 20, July 3, August 1, August 15, August 29](#)).

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March 10 Lesson: Testing Our Faith

Spring Quarter: Examining Our Faith Unit 1: Faithful vs Faithless

Lesson 2: Week of March 10, 2024 By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11
Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 13:5a

Lesson Aims

1. Identify criteria for being “in the faith.”
2. Explain how the imperatives of 2 Corinthians 13:11 are interrelated.
3. Create a test question that reflects Paul’s challenge in the key text (13:5a).

Introduction

As we know, social media is filled with opportunities to test ourselves. We can test our knowledge of history, the Bible, government and even our personalities and tastes. Self-testing is part of modern culture. We test ourselves to gain insight into our capabilities and sometimes such testing is quite valuable. So, we all take tests, need tests, and benefit from tests. And this includes, as we will see, the benefits of Christians and churches testing themselves.

Lesson Context

Paul had established the church in Corinth during a personal visit to that city in about AD 52 (Acts 18:1-18). We are not certain how many letters he wrote, but there were at least two – the ones we call I and 2 Corinthians. We know Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in preparation for a return visit (2 Corinthians 10:2; 12:20-21; 13:10). While the church in Corinth had, in general, responded favorably to Paul’s previous letter (see chapter 7), he knew some problems remained (12:20, 21).

At least part of the reason for those problems was that some doubted that Christ was speaking through Paul; they wanted proof (2 Corinthians 13:3). Was he a true apostle of the Lord Jesus, or was Paul a con artist? Some Corinthians thought that Paul’s weaknesses – his weak presence and suffering-filled ministry meant

that the answer was “no.” But Paul proved earlier in the letter that such weakness and suffering proved the opposite (much of chapters 6, 10 and 11).

Weakness was how Jesus came into the world, and he suffered on the cross to display God’s power (2 Corinthians 13:4). Paul’s apostolic ministry had been (and was being) tested and verified through suffering rather than by avoiding it. The power of God seen in Paul’s suffering was also seen in the life of Jesus. In like manner, through Paul’s suffering and weakness, God’s power gave life through Paul’s ministry. Therefore, it wasn’t Paul’s credibility that was on the line. Rather it was the credibility of the naysayers in the church at Corinth that was at issue.

Examination (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

This is the second time that Paul has challenged the believers in Corinth to “examine and test” themselves (the first time was in 1 Corinthians 11:28). The challenge was for the readers to undergo a season of spiritual self-discernment. This self-examination required the readers to stop questioning Paul’s credibility and instead look to their credibility as Christian believers.

It is important to note how the word “faith” is used in this context. This word usually refers to one’s personal belief (assent) in Christ (John 20:31; 2 Corinthians 4:13, etc.). Also included in that understanding is the concept of trust. Therefore, the word “faith” in Scripture typically means belief plus trust (Psalms 78:22; 86:2; Romans 4:5; 2 Timothy 1:12).

However, that is not the sense here. Instead, the phrase “the faith” refers to the body of doctrine to be believed and practiced (Acts 6:7; Ephesians 4:13; Titus 1:13; Jude 3). Thus, Paul’s challenge is not to examine oneself to determine how much faith (belief plus assent) his readers have in Jesus but rather to determine whether the readers accept his doctrinal teaching regarding the nature of the Christian faith. The stress on the importance of being “in the faith” is highlighted by the bookend phrase “examine yourselves and test yourselves.”

Testing, both self-imposed (Galatians 6:4) and imposed by others (1 Peter 4:12, 13, etc.) is necessary for evaluating one’s status regarding whether “Christ Jesus is in him or her.” The test is not graded in terms of letter grades but pass/fail. Either Jesus is in you, or he is not; there’s no in-between. To fail in this regard is to “fail the test.”

To be sure, there are great tragedies in life and all of us can name a few. But to me, there is no greater tragedy than for Jesus to be in our company and we fail to recognize him.

But back to the question in verse 5b. The goal of the test is to make it clear that Christ is indeed in them (the rebellions in Corinth), and the means by which the test is performed is Paul himself. Allegiance to him as their apostle is the criteria that determines whether Christ is present in their lives since Paul is confident that he himself has already passed the test (2 Corinthians 13:6).

So, while this question (verse 5) challenges the entire church in Corinth, it seems intentionally focused on those who were dismissive of Paul and unconvinced of his authority. Thus, we detect a bit of “verbal jabbing” by Paul. Those who find fault with him are revealing a fault of their own. Truth is, they ought to test themselves rather than test Paul. They should be concerned about their own failure of the test rather than whether Paul had failed it. Paul’s hope, of course, was that the readers would realize the seriousness of the issue. To “fail” the self-evaluation would be to reveal a life without Jesus.

Verse 6 says, **“And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.”**

It has been noted here that Paul does two things to the phrase “unless of course, you fail the test” from the previous verse. (1) he changes the question to a statement, and (2) he changes “you” to “we.” These indicate that Paul was confident that his proposed self-examination on the part of the Corinthians would cause them to realize who had the presence of Christ (Paul himself and most members of the church at Corinth) and who did not (the minority of troublemakers in that church).

Now, the key to reaching the correct conclusion was being sure that the proper criteria were applied to the assessments. Paul sprinkles these criteria throughout this letter (example: 2 Corinthians 10:2, 7, 12) and includes the general criteria noted in the next verse in our lesson.

Question! How can believers “examine” their beliefs and actions to ensure they are “in the faith”?

Expectation (2 Corinthians 13:7-10)

As Paul prepared for his third visit to Corinth, he prayed to God regarding the state of the church there. Paul’s prayer calls upon God to strengthen the readers against doing “anything wrong.”

In this light, we keep in mind that a significant theme of this letter is a defense of Paul’s ministry and apostolic authority. And the two main pieces of evidence that validate that ministry and authority were God’s power that shone through Paul’s weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9; 13:4) and the moral transformation of the members of the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:2-6). For those believers “not to do anything wrong” would maintain their growth with regard to that transformation. And Paul hastened to add that this was “not so that people will see that we have stood the test” (that is, for the sake of his reputation), but so that you will do what is right” (that is for the reputation of his readers). Thus, Paul is principally concerned that his readers bear the fruit of their transformation and be less concerned with his credentials as an approved apostle.

Sometime back I read Richard Foster’s book “Life with God.” One of the things Foster makes clear is that we should read the Bible for spiritual transformation—to be spiritually transformed ourselves. God has said to us, “I am with you—will you be with me?” This is what Paul is encouraging his readers at Corinth—to be with God by bearing the fruit of their transformation.

As we prepare to move to verse 8, I think “The Message” translation of these words help us. Paul says, **“I hope the test won’t show that we have failed. But if it comes to that, we’d rather the test showed our failure than yours. We are rooting for the truth to win out in you. We couldn’t possibly do otherwise.**

We don’t just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives” (2 Corinthians 13:6-9).

The importance of truth is a theme of this letter (see 4:2; 7:14; 11:10; 12:6). And one truth was that Paul had not failed any test regarding the validity of his message and authority, though some Corinthians thought he had.

Scholar C.K. Barret says, “the ‘truth’ may be used here in a quite general sense: Paul is not out to get a verdict in his favor at any cost but wishes the truth whether it is favorable to him or not, to be present. The word however is used (by Paul and other New Testament writers) for the Gospel...Paul’s whole life is bound up with the Gospel committed to him. He could not preach a different Gospel without becoming a different person.”

So, Paul conformed his ministry to the gospel, which included his willingness to suffer and place himself in a position of weakness for the sake of others. He was willing to suffer the hardship and persecution of gospel ministry if it meant strengthening the faith of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:23-29). Paul willingly worked with his hands to be self-supporting so that the Corinthians wouldn't be distracted by requests for financial support. This was Paul's joy. He gladly lived in weakness so that the Corinthians might live in strength (2 Corinthians 12:19).

Verse 9b says, **“and our prayer is that you may be fully restored.”**

Using two passages from the Corinthian's letter (1 Corinthians 1:10 and 2 Corinthians 13:11) as touchstones, the idea is one of church unity that results from the repentance of rebellious believers.

Paul prayed that God would sufficiently equip them for life in the gospel. Paul prayed that God would move their hearts toward good and away from evil and fully equip them to participate in the ministry of reconciliation with Paul rather than oppose Paul. The perfection described here is one where the people of God are sufficiently equipped to live out the gospel in their lives faithfully.

After preaching one Sunday, a young priest was being brow-beaten at the church door by an angry and imposing woman. “You are a very young man,” she said, “to be talking about that.” The young man drew himself up as tall as possible and replied, “Madam, I represent eternity!” As the body of Christ, so do we all! And that's what Paul is reminding the readers in the church at Corinth.

In verse 10, Paul is not spoiling for a fight. He closes by saying that he has written in this harsh frankness from a distance because he would prefer, when he does come to them, not to have to deal sharply (in judgment) with them. At the same time, however, he readily reminds them of the Lord-given power he mentioned to them at the beginning of this letter fragment (2 Corinthians 10:8), an authority for building them up rather than destroying them.

Edification is what love at work does, and the Corinthians learned that from Paul long ago in his teaching (1 Corinthians 8:1). Paul calls them “beloved” and declares that “everything we do...is for the sake of building you up” (2 Corinthians 12:19). Thus, edification and love are Paul's choices for the Corinthians, and his adherence to them is the ultimate sign of his honoring of his Lord-given authority. Destruction or tearing down is the farthest thing from Paul's wishes for the Corinthians.

Question! How do believers discern whether or not a rebuke is necessary for the health of their congregation?

III. Exhortation (2 Corinthians 13:11)

Paul concluded by reaffirming his relationship with the Corinthian audience. They were his “brothers and sisters” in Christ. He had not given up on them. On the contrary, he remained connected to them as part of the family of God. Paul loved the Corinthians not only as spiritual siblings but also as their spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 12:14).

With such familial affection, Paul concludes this section with five brief and pointed challenges. The first of his challenges is found in the word translated “rejoice.” We are informed that the underlying Greek also occurs in its identical form in Philippians 3:1 and 4:4 (twice).

The second challenge, to “strive for full restoration,” reflects the content of Paul's prayer. Relational restoration is indicative of a life of holiness. Therefore, this command echoes Jesus' imperative to “Be

perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mathew 5:48). However, we are aware that perfection in this life is unattainable since all have sinned (Romans 3:23). But that doesn’t mean that the standard should be lowered.

An added part of the discussion here should be John Wesley’s doctrine of going on to perfection—being perfected in love.

The third command, “encourage one another,” seems to be a condensed version (2 Corinthians 1:4-6). The fourth command, “be of one mind,” stresses the importance of church unity (also Philippians 2:2,5). This can speak to doctrinal unity, but also essential is a shared humility that lives worthy of the gospel. Such unity will achieve the fifth imperative “live in peace” (Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Question! How can believers eliminate hindrance that prevent life with “one mind” and “in peace” with other believers?

Now Paul writes of the God “of peace” several times in his letters. But this is the only time he writes of “the God of love and peace.” Hear me now! The practice of the five imperatives would shape the Corinthian church along those two lines. Neither God nor Paul had given up on the Corinthian Church. On the contrary, both were committed to the Church.

Conclusion

As we are aware, many congregations are in turmoil and the times in which we live are perilous. Faith is under attack from within and without. In such times it is critical to take inventory and examine ourselves. The contents of Paul’s prayer (13:7) indicate the sort of life that passes the test. Avoiding evil is not enough in and of itself. Evil must be replaced with doing what is right. To avoid evil without replacing it with good is to leave one open to the situation described in Matthew 12:43-45.

As someone rightly put it, “an unexamined faith is not worth living.” So, Paul calls us to a process of discernment by which we try our hearts (see Psalm 139:23-24). Are we seeking to do good? Are we seeking to avoid evil? Are we pursuing maturity in Christ? Are we seeking to be equipped to do good and participate in the ministry of reconciliation?

“Examine yourselves about your faith,” said Paul.

Action Plan

1. How can believers “examine” their beliefs and actions to ensure they are “in the faith”?
2. In what ways can an accountability partner or a small group help a believer complete this examination?
3. What aspect of spiritual self-examination seems the most difficult for you in your current season of life?

Resources For This Lesson

1. “2023-2024 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 241-248.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume XI” by Paul Sampley, pages 176-178.
3. “The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians” by Charles R. Erdman, pages 130-134.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

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March 17 Lesson: Defending Our Faith

Spring Quarter: Examining Our Faith

Unit 1: Faithful vs Faithless

Lesson 3: Week of March 17, 2024

Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Key Verse: 1 Peter 3:17

Lesson Aims

1. Identify the Old Testament text quoted.
2. Compare and contrast the things he or she must do with what he or she “must not do.”
3. State one “must do” and one “must not do” for personal focus in the week ahead.

Viktor E. Frankl’s 1946 book “Man’s Search for Meaning” details his attempts to find meaning and purpose in his experience as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. By the end of the book, Frankl acknowledges human evil and the capacity of suffering humans to find meaning in their experience.

Numerous individuals described in Scripture suffered persecution. The various ways they reacted are timeless in their ability to instruct all future generations.

Lesson Context: Peter the Apostle

Peter was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples also known as “apostles” (Luke 6:13). His given name was Simon, but Jesus changed it to Peter, which means “a stone” (John 1:35-42). The Aramaic equivalent of “Peter” is “Cephas”, so Peter was a man with three names. Peter was known for being impulsive (for example, Matthew 16:22). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a special place among the twelve. Peter is named first in all four listings of those twelve (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). Jesus conferred on him the “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:17). And after Jesus’ ascended, Peter was a leader of the first century church. His ministry focused mainly on Jesus (see Galatians 2:8). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1-4) which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

First Peter 5:13 reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says “Babylon,” not “Rome,” but there is widespread agreement that “Babylon” is a code word for “Rome.”

Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC. This served as Peter’s analogy to Rome of the first century AD (compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 4-68).

The letter’s positive attitude toward government (1 Peter 2:13-17) may indicate that Nero’s state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see 4:12). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary. As one writer notes, 1 Peter is “one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christians to the state.”

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle. The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of Northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey. The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the region, perhaps by way of Silas, an assistant to Peter (1 Peter 5:12).

Who were the intended recipients of this letter? A case can be made for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

However, there was undoubtedly a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles in the churches that received it.

Now the occasion for Peter’s letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particular since more was yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:6,7; etc.) Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or

would experience because he had been “a witness of Christ’s sufferings” (5:1). Peter himself had suffered for that name (Acts 12).

So, 1 Peter is a letter of encouragement (5:12). The theme of “suffering” runs throughout the letter but so does the theme of “glory.” One of the encouragements that Peter gives suffering saints is the assurance that their suffering will one day be transformed into glory (example 1:6,7). This is possible only because the Savior suffered for us and then entered into His glory (1:11; 5:1). The sufferings of Christ are mentioned often in this letter.

Right Behavior (1 Peter 3:8-12)

Peter wrote this letter to prepare Christians for a “fiery trial” of persecution, yet his approach was optimistic and positive. “Prepare for the best!” was his message. If these Christians followed his instructions, they would experience the best blessings in the worst times.

Thus, Peter demands of his readers those qualities which are integral to the Christian way of life itself. These qualities describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first quality is “be like-minded!” Of course, the reference here is to “unity of mind.” Unity does not mean uniformity; it means cooperation in the midst of diversity. The members of the body work together in unity, even though they are all different. Christians may differ on how things are to be done, but they must agree on “what” is to be done and “why.”

So, our Lord prayed in the upper room – “that they all may be one” (John 17:21). And the frequency of New Testament references to unity speaks to its importance.

Question! Why might Christians not experience God’s gift of unity?

Peter sets the second quality as “Sympathy!” Here again the New Testament urges this duty upon us. We are to rejoice with those who do rejoice, and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

One thing is clear, sympathy and selfishness cannot co-exist. So long as the self is most important in the world, there can be no such thing as sympathy. Sympathy depends on the willingness to forget self, and to identify oneself with the pains and sorrows of others. Sympathy comes to the heart when Christ reigns in the heart.

Third, Peter sets “brotherly love!” Could have just as well been sisterly love. Believers are described as part of God’s household or family (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 John 3:1-2). Therefore, this third quality describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

I define a loving family this way: “A lifelong environment of appreciation, affirmation, remembrance and attention.” That needs to be the way of God’s whole family.

Peter sets four and five as “compassion and humility!” To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer (compare Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12). It’s presence reflects a life transformed by God’s love (John 3:17).

To be humble is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness and thinking of others more highly than oneself (Compare Romans 12:16; Philippians 2; 1 Peter 5:5).

As Christians, we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good, which is the Satanic level. We can return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human level. Or, we can return good for evil, which is the divine level. Jesus is the perfect example of this latter approach (1 Peter 2:21-23). As God’s loving children, we must not give “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Matthew 5:38-43), which is the basis for “justice.” However, we Christians must operate on the basis of “mercy,” for that is the way God deals with us.

So, it’s not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions (Matthew 5:44).

Verse 10 begins with a quote from Psalms 34:12-16, supporting Peter’s point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm’s superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15.

Therefore, it was an appropriate Psalm to cite an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials. With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with great specificity; “evil” as it comes from one’s “tongue” (compare James 3:1-10).

Many of the problems of life are caused by the wrong words spoken in the wrong spirit. We Christians must control our tongues.

In verse 11, there is only one idea in view, not two. “Thus, to turn from evil and do good” are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace these impulses with doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in Luke 11:24-26.

And in this continuing quote from Psalm 34:14: to “seek peace” is the same thing as to “pursue it” (compare Matthew 5:9). God’s people have peace with him (Romans 5:1), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others (14:19). This is not peace “at any cost,” but is peace “as far as it depends on you” (12:18). However, it is important to note that righteousness must always be the basis for peace (James 3:13-18).

“But what if our enemies take advantage of us?” A persecuted Christian might ask. “We may be seeking peace, but they are seeking war!” Peter gave them assurance that God’s eyes are upon His people and His ears open to their prayers. Consequently, we trust God to protect and provide. For He alone can defeat our enemies (Romans 12:17-21). P.S. “Since God is Spirit” (John 4:24), Peter described the Lord figuratively as having “eyes,” “ears” and a “face.” Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord’s character. And this technique is nothing new being used dozens of times both Old and New Testaments (Genesis 6:8; Exodus 33:23, James 5:4 are examples).

II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13-17)

Verse 13 presents us with a rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter’s audience per the next verse: **“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”**

While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition, this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does (4:12; 1 John 3:13).

Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God’s word and obey his commands (Luke 11:28). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see Romans 4:4-8).

Question! What blessing have you experienced during or following suffering for righteousness’s sake?

Verse 14b says, **“Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”** This half verse alludes to Isaiah 8:12. That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected (Isaiah 7:3-9). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents (8:12-15).

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness. We are “ready always to give an answer.” Our English word “apology” comes from the Greek word translated “answer,” but it does not mean “to say I am sorry.” Rather it means, “a defense presented in court.” “Apologetics” is the branch of theology that deals with the defense of the faith. Every Christian should be able to give a reasoned defense of his/her faith in Christ, especially in hopeless situations. A crisis creates the opportunity for witness when a believer behaves with faith and hope. Why? It is then that unbelievers will sit up and take notice.

Before proceeding further, I want to say a word about Peter’s imperative in verse 15, **“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.”** To “revere,” or sanctify (as in John 17:17,19, etc), means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy (John 18:36). Given the imperative tone of the verb “revere” as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly revere Christ as Lord more than he already is sanctified.

Now the key to understanding all this is context. And the context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: “in your hearts.” Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making him holier than he already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view him.

But back to our witness for Christ! This witness must be given with gentleness and respect, and not with arrogance and a know-it-all attitude. We are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys! And we must also be sure that our lives back up our defense of the faith.

Clearly our task and calling as Christians is to tell the story. As the hymn says, “To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.” But not only to tell the story but to be the story—in our witnessing for Christ!

Verse 16 has to do with “helping a clear conscience...” The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one’s “conscience” as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed to doing so (Acts 23:7, 24:16, Romans 9:1, etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 21:15). But one’s conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier until the light cannot enter. This leads to a “defiled conscience” (Titus 1:15). A defiled conscience is one that has been so sinned against that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong.

An elderly minister used to say to his secretary every morning, “Good day! How’s your conscience? Alive or dead?”

Proper conduct (doing good) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15,20; 4:19). When believers “suffer” for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers. The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ.

And this verse 17 also reveals another aspect of believers’ suffering: “God’s will.” No doubt, we should approach this topic with much caution because “the will of God” in some context means that he “causes” something to happen, but in other contexts it means that he “permits” it to happen. God exercises his sovereign control by permitting what he does not cause (examples, see John 1:12; 2:6; Acts 14:16; 1 Corinthians 16:7).

In any case, God is able to bring good out of suffering—indeed, that is his intent (Romans 8:20). To be sure, God does not enjoy watching people suffer, but he does allow it at times. A believer’s suffering lead to faithful endurance (Romans 5:3-4) and a deeper relationship with Christ (Philippians 6:7-10).

Conclusion

In suffering, the question asked relentlessly is “Why?” That question is natural and understandable. But it must also be temporary because ultimately the “why?” needs to be changed to “what’s next?” For this is the way that our response to suffering can also serve as a way to point people to a life of faith in Jesus. We know God wants the best for people. Thus, when such suffering occurs, believers should remember to be unified in demonstrating trust in God.

A man was going to see a Christian friend who was on her death bed. He carried a little book of cheer, a book of laughter. She said, “Oh, I know this book.” He responded, “Have you read it?” She replied, “No, I wrote it.”

Action Plan

1. In which situations is it most difficult not to respond to verbal assaults?
2. How do you remain ready to testify about the hope you have?
3. What is your main takeaway from this lesson?

Resources For This Lesson

1. “2023-2024 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 249-256.
2. “Be Hopeful: How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times,” by Warren W. Wiersbee, pages 78-88.
3. “The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X12, 1 Peter,” by Elmer G. Homrighausen, pages 124-126.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

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Conference Updates & Happenings

United Women in Faith Retreat – March 8-10: The South Georgia Conference United Methodist Women will host their annual Spiritual Growth Retreat March 8-10, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. This year's theme is "Becoming More Loving." Retreat speaker will be Anne Bosarge, and Sara Fullerton will be the worship leader. [Learn more](#)

Clergy Spouses Retreat – March 15-17: The 2024 Clergy Spouses Retreat is set for March 15-17, 2024, at Epworth By The Sea. The retreat theme will be, "Embracing Christian Friendships," with the Scripture focus being from 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." This will be a gathering with spouses from South Georgia, North Georgia, and the Alabama West-Florida conference. [Download the brochure for all the details](#) | [Register here](#)

Leading Through Trauma - March 21: This one-day retreat for South Georgia clergy will be held at Camp Tygart Pipkin Center in Ray City on March 21, 2024, from 9 am - 3 pm. Led by Cameron Bishop, we will talk about the trauma pastors experience in ministry and learn strategies for processing it so we can continue to lead well and thrive personally. The cost for this event is \$25 (lunch is included). [Click here to learn more and register.](#)

ERT Trainings: Two disaster response trainings are scheduled for April. A basic ERT Training is set for Saturday, April 20 from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm at Richmond Hill UMC. Another basic ERT Training & Chainsaw Safety Class is set for Friday, April 26 from 6 pm - 10 pm and Saturday, April 27 from 8 am to 12 pm in Midland, Ga. [Click here for more details.](#) For more information, contact Luis Morales at ert@sgaumc.com or 478-216-7729.

Post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings

The post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings are set for the following dates. These gatherings will be a time for Bishop Graves and members of the delegation to report factual information around any decisions made at General Conference. Registration will be available closer to the dates.

- **May 13** - Tifton First UMC in Tifton at 10 am
- **May 14** - St. Paul UMC in Columbus at 10 am
- **May 23** - Goshen UMC in Rincon at 10 am

Post-General Conference Laity Webinar – May 14: A laity webinar has been scheduled to provide local church lay members with information following General Conference. The date for this webinar is May 14, 2024, at 6 pm. Registration information will be available closer to the date. If this date is not convenient, South Georgia laity are invited to take part in the [Alabama West-Florida Laity Webinar](#) on May 20 at 6 pm EST.

Summer Camp 2024: Registration is now open for Camp Connect! There is 1 week of senior high camp, 2 weeks of junior high camp, and 2 weeks of elementary camp. [Find out more information and sign up today!](#)

Summer Camp Connect Leadership Team: Now hiring for Summer 2024! Do you know a college student who loves Jesus and has a heart to serve kids? If you know of any in your circle or local church, let them know about this opportunity to serve! [Learn more.](#)

Annual Conference – June 2-5: Hotel Room blocks are now open for the 2024 Annual Conference Session set for June 2-5 in Tifton. [View list here](#)

Lay Servant Ministry: [Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry dates & registration](#)

- Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries: August 13, 15, 20, 22
- Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries: Sept 10, 12, 17, 19

[View Full Conference Calendar](#)



The Most Significant Capability a Leader Can Develop

By Dr. Scott Hagan

I called three people looking for assistance with a difficult conversation on my schedule. It took me a while to identify the difficult part of the conversation. I knew the content. I knew the audience. I knew the schedule. Yet, I had convinced myself that the person I would speak to might not be able to handle what I would have to share. I took a set of unrelated ‘facts’ and fabricated a story that they would not be able to understand what I was saying. Finally, on my third call seeking help, the person on the other end of the line remarked that he understood why I did not want to look like a bad guy. Oh my, he identified it. The only difficult part of the conversation was internal.

Since then, I found this quote by Edwin Friedman that perfectly described my struggle. “The notion that people might not be able to “take” the truth probably has more to do with the anxiety of the individuals who are thinking that way” (Generation to Generation, p 172).

This pattern has repeated itself in my life and ministry over the years. It is motivated by my basic fear - that my efforts will fail to garner praise and positive attention. I did not want to increase anxiety in others, so instead, I took on the anxiety myself. While this sounds admirable, it serves no one in the long run. Friedman would say, “...the capacity of members of the clergy to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters...may be the most significant capability in their arsenal” (208). Friedman extends the value of such self-differentiation for congregational leaders to family systems, including marriage and parenting. This is a powerful skill for every arena of life.

To be a non-anxious presence is to “keep your head when all about you are losing theirs,” as Rudyard Kipling aptly wrote. It is owning the part of a problem you created but seeing that there is more going on in any system than can be reduced to one scapegoat. A non-anxious presence can hear and even say hard things while honoring the other person. This sounds like what it means to live by the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

This is another example of God returning me to something I already knew but needed to re-member in my heart.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Hagan is the District Superintendent of the Coastal and Northeast Districts.

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Resource Roundup – March 2024

Fresh Expressions get new showcase

Amplify Media, an online platform of the United Methodist Publishing House, has launched a new channel on Fresh Expressions. Hosted by the Rev. Michael Adam Beck, the channel highlights case studies of these new Christian communities that are reaching people outside church walls. [Learn more](#) | [Watch channel](#)

What’s a hype video and how to create one for your church

Want to promote a new sermon series, vacation Bible school, a holiday event, encourage greater giving or maybe introduce a new staff member? A hype video can help. Hype videos are especially good for your social media platforms since they can help increase how often your post is shared and help you reach a broader audience. [Learn some key steps to take.](#)

How to structure your event communication so more people register

Let's say you're planning for an upcoming event and you need to get a good head count or, perhaps, there is a cost to attend. In all your digital promotional content, you will need to highlight the key details. But letting people know about your event won't help if you fail to make it painfully easy for people to register. [Learn more](#)

Five simple ways to grow your church's Instagram account and reach

You're smart, you're (somewhat) social media savvy, so let's assume that you are among the many who use Instagram to get information about your church out to the masses. Now, let's say that the number of your account followers isn't quite where you'd like it to be. Perhaps you'd really like to boost your profile or connect with people who don't yet come to your church. [This article offers some more tips on ways you can expand your reach.](#)

Crafting accessible church websites

Crafting an inclusive church website is not just a matter of compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act; it's a testament to the inclusive nature of faith and a commitment to welcoming everyone. [Learn more](#)

Basics of Sound Design

If you're creating videos for your church or ministry, you may be leaving the sound as is. In this MyCom tutorial, Stephen Kawakami walks us through some basics of adding sound design to your videos. [Watch now](#)

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Retired Clergy Birthdays - March 2024

- 3/01 – Ralph Bailey: 9650 Lehigh Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 3/03 – Ricky Bishop: 292 Timberwind Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 3/06 – Ellison Whitt: 443 Lee Smith Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 3/08 – Jerry Lillard: 253 Paul Lockley Rd.; Lyons GA 30436
- 3/08 – William Bagwell: 112 Asbury St.; St. Simons, GA 31522
- 3/10 – Joey Cannon: 146 Callaway St.; Leesburg, GA 31763
- 3/15 – Brenda Iglehart: 305 Palm Club Circle.; Brunswick, GA 31525
- 3/16 – Vance Mathis: PO Box 222; Bonaire, GA 31005

- 3/17 – George Durham: 77 Nightingale Lane; Bluffton, GA 29909
- 3/17 – David Seyle: 304 Causton Harbour Dr.; Savannah, GA 31404
- 3/18 – Tom Oliver: 509 Sunset Drive; Waynesboro, GA 30830
- 3/20 – Ronnie Culpepper: 2848 Sue Mack Dr.; Columbus, GA 31906
- 3/20 – Dan MacMinn: PO Box 1325; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 3/22 – Beverly Flowers: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252
- 3/22 – Tommy Mason, Jr.: 7321 US Highway 41; Vienna, GA 31092
- 3/23 – Dwight Bishop: 15 Blue Magnolia Dr.; Alapaha, GA 31622
- 3/23 – Jackie Thomas: 204 Glacier Trail; Warner Robins, GA 31088
- 3/23 – Jimmy Pennell: 2257 S. Lakeshore Dr.; Lake Junaluska, NC 28745
- 3/24 – Larry E. Bird: 325 Langston Chapel Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458-3773
- 3/28 – Hal Brady: 901 Commonwealth Circle; Newnan, GA 30287



Obituary: Rev. Marshall Burns Willis

The Reverend Marshall Burns Willis (94) passed away peacefully at his home on Saturday, February 17th, 2024. He was born on September 18, 1929 to Frank and Reba (Burns) Willis. Growing up in Ocilla, Georgia, Burns attended Ocilla High School where he played center on the varsity basketball team that went to the state finals. Completing high school at 17 he attended the Citadel for one year. His next step was to attend Wake Forest College where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and continued his education earning a Masters of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In 1954, he was ordained into the United Methodist Church of the South Georgia Conference where he served churches including the associate pastor at First UMC in Jesup, Senior Pastor of Epworth UMC in Jesup. He then moved to Texas to participate in a pastoral counseling and hospital chaplaincy program in Houston and pastored at First Methodist Church, Bryan, Texas. Returning to the South Georgia UMC Conference he continued ministering at Thomasville First UMC associate pastor, Senior Pastor of Striplin Terrace UMC in Columbus, Forest Hills UMC in Macon, Sandersville UMC, Pine Forest UMC in Dublin, Fort Valley UMC and as the District Superintendent of the Thomasville District. He and his wife enjoyed retirement in Thomasville for 35 years.

Although ministry was his calling and passion, he enjoyed playing golf, reading, (particularly discussing what he had read), and traveling. Unbeknownst to many, he played a mean harmonica and was an accomplished painter. In addition, his love for others was exemplified far beyond the walls of the church. Burns' own deep desire for meaning for life often led him to connect with others by asking how a particular experience was meaningful to them.

During retirement Burns worked tirelessly at the Thomas County Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity, and Helping Hands of Thomasville. He led many mission trips in the southeastern US and beyond. His mission ministry in Jamaica continued to inspire medical mission trips for forty years. Burns Willis was truly a pastor and minister who connected with compassion to all those who knew him as well as a loving and devoted husband, father, and grandfather, who will be missed dearly.

Burns is predeceased by his loving wife, Rose Bullard Willis to whom he was married for 71 years, and his sister Sydney Willis Blackmarr of Tifton. Surviving children include Lisa Willis Salveter (Dan) of Thomasville, Jennifer Willis Payne (Weldon) of Dublin, Marsha Willis Phipps (Rich) of Manor, Pennsylvania: seven grandchildren, Natalie Salveter, Chris Salveter, Caroline Payne, Joseph Payne (Veronica), McKenna Phipps Bonato (Jared), Abby Phipps, Matthew Phipps: caregiver, Clarice Jordan.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Thomas County Food Bank.



Scripture Readings – March 5 edition

March 10

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B

- Numbers 21:4-9
- Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
- Ephesians 2:1-10
- John 3:14-21

March 17

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B

- Jeremiah 31:31-34
- Psalm 51:1-12
- Hebrews 5:5-10
- John 12:20-33